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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 000847

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SUBJECT: PART I: AFRICA-FRANCE SUMMIT - CEREMONY OVER
SUBSTANCE

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt. Reas
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¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: The XXIV Africa-France Summit in Cannes was an anodyne event that took place without pyrotechnics under the banner of "Africa and World Equilibrium." Turn-out, with 34 African heads of state in attendance, was below the peak of the 2003 Paris Summit and failed to match the standard set at the 2006 Africa-China Summit in Beijing. Chirac proclaimed that the goal of stability in Africa was inseparable from advancing democracy. Eighteen African nations signed on to the UNITAID initiative. In a GoF-staged side-meeting on Darfur, the heads of state for Sudan, Chad, and CAR renewed a pledge against fomenting cross-border rebellion; the GoF privately discounted the declaration's impact. Cote d'Ivoire, the major sub-Saharan African crisis involving over 3,500 French peacekeepers, was kept at arms length. A key Summit outcome, as seen from Chirac's Africa Cell, was French success in mitigating the fallout from the absence of President Mugabe of Zimbabwe. More on the dynamics of the Sudan-Chad-CAR Mini-Summit and on how France tackled the Mugabe problem reported septel.

¶2. (C) Summary and Comment C'td. Chirac, 74 years old and in the last months of his presidency, resisted the impression -- embraced by the press and African notables -- that the 15-16 February gala represented his leave-taking from power and from the African continent. Although without a specific political agenda in Cannes, Chirac did continue to promote signature multilateral issues: his vision of a UN Environmental Organization and the international airticket solidarity levy at the core of UNITAID. But apart from pull-asides, Chirac conducted only two formal bilateral meetings, one with African Union Chairman and Ghana President Kufuor, the other with Namibian President Pohamba, the only African on an "official" visit to France. German Chancellor Merkel, in her capacity as EU President and G-8 Chair, set the stage for an Africa-EU event in 2007. (The attendance of a former Japanese Prime Minister went largely unnoticed.) In press remarks, Chirac lauded Chinese engagement in Africa as "positive" and "necessary." Egypt, a relative newcomer to Africa-France Summits, was chosen to host the next event in ¶2009. End Summary and Comment.

Africa and World Equilibrium

¶3. (SBU) Jacques Chirac presided February 15-16 in Cannes at the XXIV Africa-France Summit. The official theme for the

Cannes Summit was "Africa and World Equilibrium." There were panels on "Africa and Natural Resources," "The Place and Weight of Africa in the World," and "Africa and the Information Society." The kernel of the event lay less in formal exchanges than in the ritual of reunion and the availability of ready pull-asides. At 49 delegations, including 36 Heads of State (counting Chirac and EU President/G-8 Chair/German Chancellor Merkel), turn-out in Cannes bettered figures for the 2005 Summit in Mali (24 Heads of State) but failed to match the 2003 Summit in Paris, where France had mustered a record-high 43 leaders in an attempted show of diplomatic clout and opposition to military intervention in Iraq. Cannes turn-out also came in below the 11/2006 China-Africa Summit in Beijing, which gathered over 40 leaders and seemed to mark a watershed event. The presence at Cannes of former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori was a curiosity that likely reflected more Chirac's personal ties to Japan than coordination on African affairs (Ref A). By contrast, high-level EU attendance, by EU President and German Chancellor Merkel as well as EC Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Michel -- stands out as a possible turning point for the future of the Africa-France Summit.

Africans Missing in Action

¶4. (C) Mugabe's absence and that of SADC members South Africa, Angola, Tanzania, and DRC will be discussed septel. Other absentees included the leaders of Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Rwanda, Kenya, Senegal, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Eritrea. The absences of Gbagbo, Kagame and Conte were

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unsurprising. The MFA offered no explanation for Kibaki's failure to show, except to note that Kenya rarely takes part and to deny any dust-up after Kenyan press allegations that Chirac's proposal for a UN Environmental Organization envisioned a first-world headquarters and would leave the Nairobi-based UN Environmental Program out in the cold. Commenting on February 21, Jacques Champagne de Labriolle, Deputy Counselor in Chirac's Africa Cell, explained that Wade, a staple participant at recent Africa-France Summits, stayed in Dakar to pull out the stops in his election campaign; failure to carry the election in the first round on February 25 would constitute a profound political humiliation in African terms, he said. (Note: Wade nonetheless made a mark at the Summit by releasing a fawning farewell epistle to Chirac, which further reinforced the sense of the Summit as a grand farewell party.)

¶5. (C) On Eritrea, Labriolle revealed that the GoF had rebuffed an offer by Afwerki to fly to Cannes for the side-bar on Darfur border issues, because the Eritrean leader declined otherwise to participate at the Africa-France Summit. As to the Tunisian and Libyan leaders, Labriolle said they never take part in Africa-France Summits. King Mohammed VI of Morocco publicly excused himself on account of his wife's advanced pregnancy, leaving Algerian President Bouteflika as the lead representative of the Maghreb. While Labriolle hinted that Mohammed VI may be dealing with family tensions at home, Egyptian Embassy Counselor Heba Sidhom believed Mohammed VI wanted rather to avoid an awkward encounter with Bouteflika in the run-up to the roll-out of the next Moroccan plan for Western Sahara. Chirac, in off-the-record remarks to select journalists, called Mohammed VI's absence the "greatest disappointment" of the Summit, we heard on February 24 from Stephen Smith, the Paris-based Africanist and co-author of the 2005 French bestseller, "How France Lost Africa."

An EU Tutorial on Africa?

17. (C) MFA AF PDAS-Equivalent Caroline Dumas commented on February 16 that the GoF had actively courted the presence of EU President Merkel and EC Commissioner Michel as part of a general strategy to lift EU awareness of African issues and buttress planning for a 2007 EU-Africa Summit. This was not meant to prefigure, she said, doing away with the Africa-France format in favor of primarily EU-centered activities. The GoF nonetheless believed the Africa-France Summit represented a valuable opportunity, even pedagogical vehicle, for EU partners to engage on Africa. In similar comments, Labriolle declared that the GoF tries now to craft Africa-France Summit themes in broader and more topical terms, partly in order to reach a larger European public by targeting hot-button issues like immigration flows, the demand for natural resources, and the information society. Broadly speaking, the GoF needs wider European buy-in for active engagement in Africa -- often a harder sell, Dumas suggested, with the EU at 27 members and its center of gravity shifting eastward.

18. (C) Educating other Europeans about Africa will help France gain more bang for its euro at Brussels, we often hear. Our MFA contacts frequently note that France channels a supposedly disproportionate chunk of its assistance through the EU. Chirac, in press remarks in Cannes, highlighted how France contributes 16 percent of the EU budget and 25 percent of the European Development Fund (EDF). We hear occasional MFA grumbling that the GoF does not get its money's worth, that it has diminishing control over how the EU apportions the kitty, and that France often has an uphill battle in arguing African priorities with many newer EU members. The UK, which contributes less to the EDF, has an edge over France in terms of flexibility and even bilateral influence, the argument goes. (Note: Overall, the MFA is quick to seek and extol the benefits and legitimacy brought by the EU to African policies, but there are pockets of ambivalence -- a reflection of France's own complex relationship with the EU. End Note.)

19. (C) Thinking ahead to the Portuguese EU Presidency, Labriolle suggested an EU-Africa Summit would work better than an EU-AU Summit. Building the meeting around the African Union would pose the problem of how to involve Morocco, which remains outside the AU Union due to that organization's recognition of the Polisario. Labriolle's

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more cutting criticism, however, regarded whether the AU warranted treatment as a full partner with the EU. The weaknesses of the AU, already the cause of many disappointments, would become even more manifest once current AU Chairperson Alpha Oumar Konare and AU Peace and Security Commissioner Said Djinnit departed, Labriolle feared.

Skirting the Question of China

110. (C) The growing inroads of China into Africa now represent a commonplace theme for French journalism. In remarks to the press, Chirac, taking care not to give offense even as celebrations of the Chinese New Year were going forward, praised Chinese engagement in Africa as "positive" and "necessary." While Japan's presence was welcome at Cannes, there was nonetheless ambivalence about how to approach the role of China, let alone the possibility of Chinese participation. Egyptian Embassy Counselor Heba Sidhom, who attended the Summit and participated in preparatory meetings, claimed that some Paris-based African ambassadors wanted a workshop on China in Africa, but Michel de Bonnacorse, Chirac's Africa Counselor, put the kabosh on their proposal. By contrast, Japanese Embassy Africa Watcher Chie Kinumaki, who also took part at the Summit, told a somewhat different tale, maintaining that the GoF, once the Cannes Summit got under way, had sought to introduce discussion of China, but that African delegations had balked,

noting the topic wasn't on the formal agenda as well as stating their preference that it not be added.

A Tradition Limp On

¶11. (C) The 2007 Africa-France Summit was neither fish nor fowl. A farewell for Chirac? Closure for France-Afrique? A hand-over to the EU? Another family photo op? The mood of uncertainty extended to questions about the very future of these biennial meetings. Chirac, who has yet to renounce his interest in a third term at the Elysee, coyly declared that Cannes would not be his last Africa-France Summit. The tradition of the Africa-France Summit, one assumes, will continue, at least for a time. Mubarak copped the big brass ring -- the honor of hosting the 2009 version -- but the French MFA remains cagey about the long-term, waiting for guidance from the next French Presidency and confessing a certain weariness of the Summits, which are portrayed increasingly as matters of protocol rather than policy. Perhaps the Summits have outlived their day or just grown too large and lost their focus. Anecdotal feedback from Cannes indicated largely ceremonial and pro forma encounters only.

Washing Up on the Nile?

¶12. (C) The move to an Egyptian venue represents a departure from the origins of the Summit. In 1973, President Pompidou, supposedly at the behest of the President of Niger, first called together the hard-core of sub-Saharan Francophonie (and the Central African Franc Zone) at a meeting in Paris attended by only 6 African heads of state and 4 other delegations, all from former French colonies. The 1976 Paris Summit saw the first participation by non-Francophone delegations. The first appearance by a Head of State from a non-Francophone state -- Somalia -- occurred at the 1980 Nice Summit. Egypt itself is a relative latecomer, taking part at ministerial level for the first time at the 1981 Paris Summit -- incidentally the first summit also to include an Anglophone African nation, Zimbabwe. And Egypt first participated at the level of head of state at the 1998 Paris Summit. Morocco, a former French protectorate (1912-1956), admittedly hosted the 1988 Casablanca Summit, the first such summit to take place outside either metropolitan France or sub-Saharan Africa, and an occasion for Gabonese President Bongo to lament the "dilution" of the Summits and their slide into soporific gabfests. A 2009 Cairo Summit would appear a similar threshold event, shifting the center of gravity even further from its core sub-Saharan roots.

Chirac: A Leopard Changing His Spots?

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¶13. (C) Chirac started his Presidency in 1995 by inviting back to the Elysee the octogenarian Jacques Foccart, "Monsieur Afrique" under de Gaulle and Pompidou, the master architect of the personal networks that defined French political and economic policy on the continent. Foccart died in 1997, but Chirac continued the tradition of highly personal management of African affairs. Before the Cannes Summit, the campaign headquarters of Socialist presidential candidate Segolene Royal released a diatribe denouncing Chirac for cynicism and chumminess with dictators and human-rights abusers. The campaign quickly retracted the piece, which Royal had not personally approved, but perhaps also because French policies in Africa historically have a bit of the glass house about them and one should be careful when throwing rocks. Still, such criticisms continue to percolate in a France that nowadays makes readier reference to the Rights of Man than to Raison d'Etat.

¶14. (C) In Chirac's 2007 speech at Cannes, solidarity stood alongside stability as the twin pillars of French policy in Africa. Yes, Chirac's France in 2007 will continue to abide by its defense agreements in Africa and stand vigil to preserve the territorial integrity of longstanding "clients" like Chad and the Central African Republic -- but with an inflection of EU resources, forces, and even "legitimacy", wherever possible. Under the rubric of solidarity, Chirac advocated protection of the environment and assistance for the victims of HIV/AIDS, with UNITAID, the initiative launched by Chirac during the 2006 UNGA, a centerpiece at the Cannes Summit. Chirac -- generally not considered a champion of the exportation of democracy, certainly not "multiparty" democracy, when other interests vie for priority -- went on record nonetheless that lasting stability in Africa can only be achieved with the advance of democracy, proper elections, good governance, and respect for human rights.... Foccart, the realpolitik bogeyman of historical French policy in Africa, must be turning in his grave.

¶15. (C) The Royal camp's diatribe, while short-lived, tapped into a vein of self-doubt about the past and present of French African policy. Those same misgivings underlie the token effort by NGOs like Oxfam, Greenpeace and Survie to stage a Counter-Summit in Paris to the Cannes France-Africa Summit. In an indirect rebuke to Chirac, Sarkozy himself has promised a retreat, if elected, from the personality-based diplomacy that has long characterized GoF postures in Africa, proposing the need for a more institution-based approach, repudiating stability-obsessed realpolitik, and proclaiming that universal values -- human rights, religious freedom, and democracy -- are the foundations of good policy and inseparable from the true interests of France (Ref B). Royal has even proposed abolishing the notorious "Africa Cell" at the Elysee.

¶16. (C) Reformist impulses aside, Chirac's approaching departure from power begs the question of who, among his possible successors, could even dream of taking up his mantle. Chirac has been glad-handing the leaders of Africa for decades. No other Western leader can lay claim to a comparably broad and deep network of acquaintances and friendships there. Once Chirac goes, France must inevitably approach Africa differently. He leaves no true understudy for the role of "Monsieur Afrique"; PM Villepin, perhaps, aspired to the role, but his presidential ambitions have since foundered. One has to wonder if Chirac's nod to good governance, his more democratic vocabulary, does not stem in part from an inkling that he represents the last in a certain line of French Africanists and from his prescience, as a canny politician, that it would be prudent to stake out a claim as a precursor of the emergent reformist generation. That said, there was no intrinsic boldness to Chirac's words, which could have been spoken by many Western leaders; only their contrast with Chirac's historic caricature within Africa lends them unique if transient interest.

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